

# ANIMALS - PLOVERS

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## Plover Numbers Up But Rules Changes Proposed

Piping plovers are doing well. According to figures recently released by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, the stocky little shorebirds are making a comeback thanks to citizen cooperation with beach management procedures.

However, Massachusetts is seeking permission to change some of the protections on beaches for the plover. The state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife has submitted a permit application to change conservation measures on certain beaches.

Piping plovers, tiny shore birds that nest and breed on Massachusetts beaches from late March through summer, are considered a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

The largest plover populations are on Cape Cod and the Islands. Five pairs of nesting plovers found a home at Plymouth Beach and another 5 settled at Duxbury Beach last summer in protected nesting areas.

To protect the birds, officials in both towns have hired extra summer workers to keep plover nests from being run over by off-road vehicles.

The piping plover population has more than tripled in 7 years under the conservation plan. In 1987, there were just 126 pairs. Last year, there were 445 pairs.

Under the guidelines issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, beaches used as nesting habitat by piping plovers may be closed to vehicular traffic for periods from late May to late July when unfledged chicks are present. Chicks are so well-camouflaged that it is virtually impossible to spot them and they may inadvertently be disturbed or injured by recreational activities. Beaches remain open to foot traffic and recreational activities such as swimming, sun-bathing and fishing.

The DFW has submitted an application under Section 10 of the Federal Endangered Species Act. In its application, the DFW has detailed various alternatives to current plover management strategies that would result in some increased management flexibility while still ensuring the continued recovery of the piping plover. Should the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issue the permit, some limited mortality of plovers under activities that are otherwise legal would be permitted.

A coast-wide network of cooperators, including state and federal agencies, private conservation groups, and local municipalities is responsible for monitoring and protecting piping plovers at over 80 beaches in Massachusetts.

Over the 10 years that aggressive management strategies have been in place, plover numbers have increased dramatically. Brad Blodget, state ornithologist, reports that an intensive census in 1986 turned up 139 pairs of piping plovers. A similar census conducted in 1995 revealed 445 nesting pairs.